

**TALKING PAPER
ON
THE BASIC BELIEFS OF ISLAM**

- Five pillars:
 - **Declaration of faith (shahadah).** A vow proclaiming “there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger.”
 - **Five compulsory daily prayers (salat).** Muslims, rich and poor alike, recite the Qur’an and praise God. Proper ablution precedes prayer. Congregational prayer is traditionally on Friday.
 - **Almsgiving/welfare contribution (zakat).** Muslims have a responsibility to care for the less fortunate. Everything belongs to God.
 - **Fasting during Ramadan (sawm).** Fasting is done in obedience to God to create a consciousness of God and sharpen an awareness of the less fortunate.
 - **Pilgrimage (the hajj).** Once in a lifetime obligation. A pilgrimage to Mecca reaffirming the brotherhood and belief of all Muslims regardless of race, color, nationality, or class.
- Basic teachings:
 - One all-powerful Creator. There are 99 names for Allah (i.e., Merciful and Beneficent).
 - God’s revelations have been sent to humankind through angels, prophets and messengers.
 - God has spoken His eternal message through holy books. Jews and Christians are called “people of the book.” The revelation had to be sent one last time through the Qur’an.
 - Accountability for all actions in the Day of Judgment.
 - Islamic law (Sharia). Developed by religious scholars and judges on the basis of the Qur’an, other words of the Prophet (Hadith), analogical deduction and community consensus.
 - Islamic community (umma). A prime aim of the Qur’an is the establishment of a just, ethically based social order on earth, and Muslims are to strive to bring it out.
- Two major and one minor school of thought:
 - **Sunni.** Authority rests in the community, guided by formal/legalist religious leaders, consensus and Islamic law. Leaders protect and defend Islam.
 - **Shi’a.** The charisma of Mohammed would be passed on in direct blood lineage. Religious and political authority rests in Imams alone; an infallible spiritual guide.
 - **Sufi.** Branches of mystical/spiritual intensity within Sunni and Shi’a circles. Sufis often practice ascetic ways – recalling the austere life of early Mecca and Medina.